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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: December 26, 2008
Re: Jose Cruz Gonzales-Jury Gives
Murderer a Christmas Verdict

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Jose Cruz Gonzales, age 30, of Modesto was convicted on December 23, 2008, of First Degree Murder, having used a firearm during the commission of the offense. Deputy District Attorney Shawn D. Bessey prosecuted the case on behalf of the People.

The family members of Thomas Allen Cox had been waiting over three years for the words "We the jury find Jose Cruz Gonzales guilty of murder in the first degree". They got their wish at 4:45 p.m. on December 23rd. After two and a half hours of deliberation, a Stanislaus County jury found Gonzales, age 30, guilty of the murder of Cox, age 24. The verdict came at the conclusion of a trial that lasted two and half weeks.

During the late night hours of Sunday, August 28th, 2005, Gonzales shot and killed Cox out on an MID canal bank west of Salida. He shot him four times with a semi-automatic hand gun and dumped Cox's body into the canal. Cox's body was found on August 30th by a farmer who was irrigating his crops. Investigation by the Sheriff's Department led them to Gonzales, a Norteno gang member from the Westside of Modesto.

Gonzales, originally from Salinas, California, had moved to Lodi where he met and became friends with Cox. Cox, a devoted boyfriend and father, became enamored with the gangster lifestyle of Gonzales. Both Cox and Gonzales moved to Modesto and got deeper into the gang way of life. Gonzales, known as "gaucho" on the street, told people that Cox was a snitch and he "hated" him. Cox was living life in the fast lane but that life came to a screeching halt one hot August night back in 2005, when Gonzales dumped his bullet ridden body in that canal.

Although the jury didn't find that Gonzales did the murder with the intent to further the gang, most likely because the killing of Cox was not sanctioned by the higher ups (shot callers) in the Norteno street gang, they did find he used a gun and the killing was premeditated. Deputy District Attorney Shawn Bessey, who tried the case for the People, said that alone should result in a fifty years to life sentence for Gonzales. The family of Thomas Cox was relieved to hear that Gonzales will, most likely, spend the rest of his life in prison.

Gonzales is scheduled to appear for his sentencing on January 21st, 2009 in front of the Honorable Judge Hurl Johnson who presided over the trial. Bessey said that “The gangster mantra “Smile Now Cry Later” was a prevalent theme throughout this trial but no matter how much fun gangsters think they are having, it always ends up with someone crying. In this case, the family members of Thomas Cox, including his young daughter, mourn his death while the family members of Gonzales are crying as he does his fifty to life in prison”.

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